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by

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VIOLET SLUMBER

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Violet Slumber

by

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Report

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Dedication

To my beloved family and friends.

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Abstract

Violet Slumber

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Andrew Garrison

This report summarizes the production process of the Narrative Short Film *Violet Slumber*, explaining the origin, conceptualization, references and how it was created as a collaboration process between a writer and a director. This film was produced as my Thesis Project for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Film & Media Production in the Department of Radio-Television-Film at The University of Texas at Austin.

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INTRODUCTION

In early 2013, I had just been admitted into the Film & Media Production MFA Program at UT Austin. I was telling the exciting news to a good friend of mine and the first thing he said was the following. “If I can give you a piece of advice, think about what your voice is going to be over there, as a Chilean person in the U.S. Think about the stories you can tell there that reflect where you come from and who you are.” “Sure,” I said, and never thought about it again. Two years later, during the spring semester of 2015, in the middle of the post-production process of my Pre-Thesis Film, I was invited to a panel entitled Latino Filmmaking & Media Studies, at the Department of Radio-Television-Film at UT Austin. I was asked to talk about my work and how being a Latino was reflected in my films.

The moment of truth came and there I was... sitting in front of a small yet very polite audience... thinking. I realized that I was the only speaker on that panel born in Latin-America. Everyone else was first or second generation, born in the U.S. as descendants of Latino Families. Yet, all of their films reflected Latin-American culture, whether in the US or in other countries. My films, on the other hand, didn’t have Latino or Latina characters, themes, issues or any kind of representation. The memory of my friend’s sage advise came to mind instantly. I thought, “How am I going to address this?” A Latino Filmmaker who doesn’t make Latin Films. But right then and there, I had a moment of realization: I’m Chilean, born and raised there, and Chile’s culture is very unique and very different from that of other Latin American countries. Also, since the Chilean community in Texas is incredibly small, telling stories about home and people from my country in Austin was very difficult. More than a Latino, South-American, or even a Chilean person, I’m a foreigner living in Texas. That is who I am when I make

films. Therefore, I focused my approach on being a foreigner and on how I can portray those ethics and points of view in my films through language, story, themes, style and aesthetics.

A QUICK REVIEW OF PAST WORK

My first project in the program was a short documentary film titled *The Armor*. The film is about a Design-Engineer who works for G&E, but is also a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism – an international organization with thousands of members around the world who reenact medieval traditions. In this organization, everybody has a Medieval Persona, with a name and a personal backstory. Thus, the film is an exploration of this subject and his double life, and how the real world and this “fictional” world collide. It raises questions about which world is more real for him. As the director of the film, my approach had what we can call a “double foreigner” angle: it was my first semester in Austin and I was coming straight from Santiago, but apart from that, I was also a non-member of this organization. Not only was I a foreigner to the city but, in the eyes of my subjects, I was a foreigner to their medieval world as well. I tried to use this to my advantage. I wanted to see this world from an outsider’s perspective, to observe this organization from a more objective and critical point-of-view. For that reason, I was able to delve deeper with some questions than I otherwise would have, such as “How do you mix these two worlds?” or “What does this activity really represent to you?” The process was partially successful and partially a failure because, in the end, the movie doesn’t go anywhere. It lives in a reflective state and there isn’t much of a plot or story. The lesson was learned: in order to discover, we must go even deeper into these new worlds and not just observe from a distance.

During the spring of 2014, I had to direct my first Narrative Short. As a foreigner, I tried to tell a local story from an outsider's point-of-view. Therefore, I picked a story about an innocent boy and a tough father on a hunting day. I've never hunted in my life. Still, I was very interested in the dynamics between a father and son while they were doing something traditional and horrendous at the same time. I was also interested in exploring this topic from the perspective of someone who is not familiar with the brutality that hunting can bring. Explorations of what manhood is, what is expected from men, and how we deal with the consequences of our actions were all questions explored in the film, without necessarily having a clear answer to each of those queries.

The foreigner point-of-view was inherent in the film's style, manifesting itself through elements that are considered non-classical compared to the American tradition (that of making the films move forward as quickly and efficiently as possible). The practice of fast cutting and not having much time to reflect on the actions of the characters is abundant in Hollywood films. However, I wanted to explore the complete opposite. Latin American Film tradition dictates, sometimes, that films should have space for reflection – rhythms are slower and movies are quieter. This is because stories do not necessarily have to be efficient, or move forward as quickly as possible to be accepted by the audience. We can linger on with the characters and try to discover what's going on inside their heads, making the plot more existential than it is action-based.

The lack of one protagonist was essential in playing with these non-American elements in an American story. Since the United States is a country that worships the triumph of the individual, the sole protagonist is a common element in most American films. However, I wanted to question that paradigm by bringing in an element that is common in Latin American films, where the film belongs to all of the characters.

Nevertheless, I grew up watching classical American films. Because of Chile's lack of a big Cultural Industry, most of the entertainment and artistic goods we consume come from the US. My favorite films, bands and artists in general are from either the US, Canada or Europe. Having that in mind, during my second year I wanted to tell a Fantastic Film for Children, inspired by *E.T.* by Steven Spielberg (one of my favorite films of all time). The project was titled *Ignition*, and it was about a kid who wants to build and fly a rocket ship to space to find his missing Astronaut father. Again, I wanted to portray strong elements and themes in American imaginary, such as the obsession with space, but using foreign elements in terms of the aesthetics of the film.

This time the film had one protagonist, with a clear goal, following the traditional canon. However, the film was shot in a non-conventional way for a Children's film: long shots, handheld camera work, jump cuts, broken frames at a times. The idea of this was expanding the concept of what makes a Children's story a film for kids. Is it the story by itself? Is it the visual treatment or the themes? I asked myself many questions when I thought where to put the camera, or why this narrative beat is about this or about that.

This project was the first time I wanted to bring something from my home country to the movie in an indirect way, which is the fact that the protagonist doesn't want to assume that his father is dead and he is never coming back. The inspiration for this is the sense of loss that happens when you don't know what happened with missing people, and in Chile we have a horrible past about that. The Pinochet dictatorship that took over power in my country from seventeen years was involved in horrendous crimes: executions and disappearing of the bodies of political prisoners were too abundant. Until today, there are thousands of families trying to find out where the rest of their loved ones who are still missing are, and they won't rest until they find the bodies of the missing family members. The search for "proof of life" of that tragic situation is constant in our

culture as Chileans. Thus, Pete, the protagonist of *Ignition*, is trying to fly to space to look for his missing dad, looking for that proof of life and not wanting to accept the fact that he is dead. Therefore, the film portrays the way children deal with loss and how they cope with tragedy, in a very unique way. Luckily, my family didn't have to deal with this tragedy, but these emotions live deep inside of our DNA as country.

There are stories that are just universal, when the emotions portrayed are basic, raw and honest. It doesn't matter where we are, or where we come from, some stories could be told here in Austin, TX, in rural Chile or any place at all. That adaptability in stories is something that I find to be very interesting, without losing the ability to portray a specific reality in a specific moment in time. The emotions are universal but the s could be anywhere.

Ignition, also, represented a step forward in some genre interests that I had since I was in the Undergrad program. I've always been a Sci-Fi and Fantasy fan but I prefer when those stories are brought into a realistic setting, when the stories are more about the human condition than the fantastic elements. "Magical Realism" could be a way to define this genre that I have always loved, but since "Magical Realism" is traditionally tied to the Revolutionary movements in Latin America, I thought it was unfair to define this genre using this concept due to the lack of political statement. Therefore, I prefer to define this approach where real life is altered by fantastic elements as "Fantastic Realism". Once *Ignition* was finished, I decided to take this genre exploration further and deeper. That's how my Thesis Project, *Violet Slumber*, began to take shape.

WRITING VIOLET SLUMBER

Violet Slumber is the story of Eve and Ambrose, a couple in their thirties who have a strange condition: every time they touch they age at an incredibly fast pace. However, they decide to try to stay together and see where their relationship goes, and see how far they can take this strange phenomenon that happens to them. Everything starts off well. They seem to enjoy the fact that they are growing old together, no matter how fast it happens. However, after two weeks of living in the same house, Ambrose starts to develop the first symptoms of dementia. Eve wants to believe that this is not a big deal and that he'll be fine, but the symptoms are getting worse and worse. Finally, they reach a point where she realizes that in order to save Ambrose and give him a life, she needs to leave him. And so she does...

Violet Slumber is a story created by the Screenwriting MFA Alumni, Travis Miauro, who wrote the story as a short story first and then presented it as a Feature Film Project in the Alternative Poetics Class of RTF Professor Charles Ramirez Berg during the Spring Semester 2015. I was in that same class as well.

The first version of the story was about the same couple, Eve and Ambrose, who age faster than normal every time they are around each other. Therefore, in order to survive they decide to meet only once a week in a neutral location around the world, since the aging was reversible once they separate. I remember vividly Travis' pitch during the class. I immediately thought the idea was powerful and had the potential to be a great project. The fact of having two characters loving each other and not being able to have a normal relationship caused by a fantastic abnormality was a very original concept, very well connected to the fantastic realism that I have always felt very drawn to, as a filmmaker and as an audience member.

After a few ideas that I hoped to develop into a Thesis film failed, because of complexity or just because they weren't good enough, I decided to contact Travis and ask him if wanted to collaborate for my Thesis film. Luckily, he accepted right away. As soon as we started to work we realized that many changes to the original idea had to happen in order to make it work as a short film where the production wasn't going to be that ambitious and impossible (such as reduce the locations, change the way we were going to show the aging and have the most powerful and painful end as possible).

SETTING THE TONE

One of the first tasks Travis and I undertook was establishing the tone and the mood of the film. Based on some interests that I had in the paintings of Andrew Wyeth, I wanted to replicate that haunting aesthetic, where the lights are intense, the color palette is earthy, unsaturated and non-violent, enhancing the realism in a more psychological and evocative space. Everything is more indirect and implied than concrete, and the paintings show a quiet and calm reality on the exterior. We thought that the Wyeth visuals and mood reference fit the tone of film, since the fantastic element was tragic and very present already, and we needed to have a strong counterpoint to balance the drama. Therefore, the visuals were going to transmit calm and reflection, in opposition with the story elements where they were leaning towards the tragedy. Of course, this evolved during the development process, but it was a good start.

At the end, the concept that wraps the whole film together is “Bitter Sweet”, since there's a beauty in their tragedy and hope in their lives.

SIMPLIFYING THE PRODUCTION

Before writing the first draft, we had to set the rules of the Universe in order to make the film more approachable from a production point-of-view. The first decision we made was to address the necessity of having to make the locations very limited. Still with the aesthetics of Andrew Wyeth in mind, we decided to have the main location be a beach house, very old and haunted. The place didn't have to necessarily take place on the beach, but we wanted that isolated feeling, making this house a refuge from the world, where Eve and Ambrose can live, love and die together.

Also the aging. How were we going to make it happen? How was it going to look visually? Therefore, we came up with the idea that Eve and Ambrose had to touch each other, skin to skin, in order for the accelerated aging process to happen. This way we had a concrete action for them, which represented desire planting the question of "Why don't they just refrain from touching each other?" And the answer was to create an element where the touching had a photochemical reaction and it had to be pleasant, almost like a drug. There was a version where we were going to see the aging happening in camera, but that would've required months of VFX work. Closer to the final draft we decided to add a violet glow every time their skin made contact instead, and we were going to see the aging gradually. Also, to elevate the stakes during earlier drafts, we decided to make the irreversible. This way, there was no way back.

AGENCY

Most of the time, in classical love stories, female characters completely lack agency and decision-making power. Their fate always depends on the male protagonist, making them just a spectator of their own fictional lives. To subvert this, we decided to

make Eve the female lead and the protagonist, and a very strong one at that. As a man, it is easier to portray male characters since it is easier to identify with, we can use our own experience, addressing the issues of manhood in a love story. Not this time. As a creative team we decided that Eve was going to be the one in charge of the decisions, good or bad ones, making her active and in control of her own life. She influences Ambrose, but she doesn't control him. We wanted to make them both as strong as possible, with clear virtues and flaws. And this aspect was present in every single draft of the screenplay.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

This was the first time I was directing a film where the idea was not my own or the drafts weren't written by me. The same goes for Travis, it was the first time he was writing something that was to be directed by someone else. Travis wrote most of the drafts after we had both been working on the treatments and step outlines. Later I did some of the re-writes, but always working on the scenes he had created. The approach changed when the moment for pick-ups came and we had to shoot a completely new version of the first scene. I'll come back to that point later...

The process was liberating, since with Travis we were always on the same page and he was always writing with a voice very similar to mine, allowing me to focus purely on directing and strategizing about how the film was going to look and what was going to be the predominant vision. The fact that we shared very similar taste for references in films, books and music made everything very easy to have a common ground and achieve good results. Also, the exercise was very useful to let go of the ego and realize that this wasn't my film or his film but a project with a life of its own. The film belongs to everybody involved in the process.

Starting the film as this kind of collaboration also opened the door for Hannah T. Bailey, the cinematographer; Michael Roberson, the producer; and Sophia Loffreda, one of the assistant directors, to have their input with the story, providing great feedback to make the film better and more powerful.

THE FIRST DRAFT

It was November 2015 and the first draft arrived in my e-mail, written by Travis Miauro, based on the hours of brainstorming and conceptualizing. The story was about Eve and Ambrose deciding if they should stay together and die together or split up, never see each other, but survive. In this version of the film, we saw them falling in love and enjoying the process of aging together as a beautiful thing. Since their love is so strong, they decide to stay together and die. Also, the film had a flashback structure, where the present time was mixed with the past, revisiting emotions and moments and making the whole temporality non-linear. The problem we had with this draft was that it was very hard to justify, in a twelve-page script, a very radical decision and sacrifice. There wasn't any space to show their love and passion in a rewarding and satisfying way. Therefore, we had to start from scratch.

SECOND DRAFT

During the Holiday Break 2015-2016 we decided to re-engineer the whole story. We made the story more based on Travis' original idea. It was structured this way:

1. How they met.
2. The first date and discovery of the condition.

3. First plan: they decide to see each other once a year, for a week and then going back to their normal lives.
4. This plan doesn't work since they need each other so much. They decide to just try and make it work and move in together in the beach house (we kept that element).
5. Of course it doesn't work, since it started to take a toll on them and they go back to the original: just meeting once a year for a week.
6. Eve and Ambrose meet other people.
7. They separate and move on with their lives.
8. They grow old separately, with their other partners, having very unfulfilling lives.
9. They decide to meet one more time, having aged naturally and having realized that it wasn't worth it, that they always belonged together.
10. They decide to finally become a couple and die together.

And again, this version didn't work. The story was too big to be told in less than twenty minutes (the script was eighteen pages). There was no space to develop the characters, there wasn't anything specific, and we spend at least a third of the script trying to explain this condition and its rules. Also, the ending felt too convenient for them, since they get to have a life and then when they don't have anything else to lose, they decide to stay together.

At the time I had placed my shoot dates for the second week of April, and since this version of the script wasn't working because it was too big and not focused, I was obligated to change the shoot dates to the first week of May. A major re-write was about to happen.

THIRD VERSION

To call this one the third draft would be unfair. The third version of the story belonged to draft eight of the script. For this version, we grabbed one big moment from the previous draft: the moment when they decide to give it a try and stay together. Also, there was an element that resonated most with people, which was Ambrose's dementia. Thus, we had something that showed the physical and mental consequences of this decision very soon in the story, adding complexity and raising the stakes.

The lessons learned throughout the previous versions of the screenplay were all applied here, in order to have a version very approachable in terms of production:

1. Reduce the number of characters: the story now focuses only on Eve and Ambrose, having Charlotte and Mark present for only two scenes as very secondary characters. The character of Sara, who has no lines, is only in the very last scene. This would make all the casting efforts simpler – no extras needed. Therefore, the drama could be concentrated just on their problem, without having to dilute the story with other characters.
2. Concentrate most of the story in one location: the house. On the final version of the film there are four locations but most of the scenes happen inside of the house they move into together. In our heads, the house was Ambrose's, but that is never clear in the film. Since we didn't think it was a question that people would care about, it remained un-answered. Also, the idea of having this one house, with the same aesthetics as Wyeth's reference, would allow us to maintain the haunted feeling we had in mind.
3. When one big dramatic moment happens, build the story to get there the best way possible. Since the moment that resonated the most was Ambrose's dementia, we took that moment as foreshadowing of what was going to happen. We had learned

from the mistakes of the past, where we had that moment but never went back to it again. Now we had it connected with everything that happens in the future and the aggravation that makes Eve finally leave, sacrificing her love in order for him to survive.

VISUAL REFERENCES

Even before starting with the idea for this film and working in previous ideas that I had for a Thesis Film, the desire to use paintings as references was very present. The point was to bring in ideas outside of the film world, in order to enhance the poetic charge of the compositions, light and textures.

The first approach, as explained before, was having Andrew Wyeth's paintings as the main reference – there was a focus on the balance between the soft and hard lights in interiors and exteriors, the importance of day light, composition in the horizontal and color palette, with soft, warm and earthy colors.



Figure 1: Wyeth, Andrew. *Teel's Island*. 1954, dry brush, Private Collection.

The image above (Figure 1) is the main reference for Ambrose's Beach House during the first two versions of the story, bringing the imaginary elements of the film into an evocative ambiance. For the interiors, Wyeth's paintings were also a direct reference to maintain the consistency of the tone, having those strong lights coming inside, invading from the outside.



Figure 2: Wyeth, Andrew. *Chambered Nautilus*. 1956, tempera on board, Private Collection

However, for the last version the inspiration changed and we wanted to bring a more psychological enhancement to the images, something that works for the enhanced realism ideas we had for the whole story. The evocative images of Wyeth worked really well for moments of calm or reflection, but we needed something different for the intense moments of drama. We found inspiration in Edward Hopper's visual style for those moments due to the balance between the soft and hard lights in interiors and exteriors and composition in tension in his work.

We also found his work to be appropriate because of the way Hopper's paintings bring something that is called "Soft Realism", which means that reality is amplified by the inner emotions of the subjects portrayed. The settings and characters are real. However, the colors and shapes are not necessarily one hundred percent realistic. The colors are a bit more saturated and the shadows more contrasted. Shapes and figures are slightly stylized in order to show turbulence, loneliness and isolation.



Figure 3: Hopper, Edward. *Room in New York*. 1932, oil on canvas, F. M. Hall Collection of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



Figure 4: Hopper, Edward. *Summer in the City*. 1949, oil on canvas, Private Collection.

After collecting ideas going through Wyeth and Hopper's paintings the next step was drawing some concept art that represented the spirit and the mood we wanted for the film. This was the result of that process.



Figure 5: Bisbal Rivas, Sebastián. *Violet Slumber Digital Drawing*, 2016.

After drawing the image showed on Figure 5, I realized that in the previous scenes before the low point of the story, the lightning had to be darker in anticipation of the drama that was about to unfold. So we changed the motivation of the lighting from going to day light to nighttime in very low-key lighting, but we kept the position and some elements of the composition. The result can be appreciated in the figure 6.



Figure 6: *Violet Slumber Film Screengrab*, 2016.

DIRECTING THE FILM

Since we had limited resources we did principal photography in six days, for an eighteen-page script, which gave us an average of three script pages per day. The cast members chosen for the film were all local actors from Austin, TX. Mariah-Rae Vincent for the role of Eve; Stephen Kirkham for the role of Ambrose; Krysta Gonzales for the role of Charlotte; Jonathan Flanders for the role of Mark; and Sara Acevedo for the role of Sara.

The method chosen for directing the actors was purely based on the core emotion of the scene. I tried to avoid being goal-oriented as much as possible, meaning that I tried to not to tell them what to do directly but talk to them about what is the true emotional meaning of a scene instead, a beat or a line. This was successful at times, but in other instances the instructions became too abstract for the actors, who needed a more direct command. I had to cave at times. “Just tell me what to do,” Mariah-Rae, the lead actress told me one time. I had to and we accomplished our shared goal. We’re told in school that we need to avoid being goal-oriented as much as possible, to give the performers their own ways of coming up with the solutions to deliver a line. Regardless, sometimes people are tired or they are not getting what the director wants because of a lack of assertiveness in the commands. Sometimes you just have to do whatever is necessary to get the best result as possible.

Meetings with the actors were abundant. I started having individual meetings with them to construct the characters and began to talk about the character’s past, even though that wasn’t part of the story. Still, it was very helpful to build the character into a real person. In those meetings, we often talked about parallels between the story and our real lives, since I wanted to connect the emotions of each scene with something real and

concrete. The elements brought into those conversations were essential for the key dramatic moments on set where we needed to reach a very important emotional beat. This method of preparing the characters with the actors is something that I learned during Professor Andrew Shea's Advanced Directing class. In that class, I learned that it is not necessary to rehearse, as long as the actors know the true emotion behind the scene.

Later on, the actors met by themselves, without me, to get to know each other better and build their characters together. They had never met before and I needed them to have a unique complicity in order for the audience to truly believe they are in love. They became friends during the process of making the film and their chemistry is present in every frame. This is something that I plan to repeat during future projects. This emotional process was even proposed by Mariah-Rae as well, since she had worked that way before and the results had been optimal.

In terms of camera language and decoupage, the original idea was to have as little fragmentation in the shots as possible. I wanted the takes to have as much of the scene action as necessary in order to not lose the energy in the actors' performances. Long shots where the camera follows the action were abundant. Sometimes shots were handheld to elicit a feeling of chaos, or sometimes stabilized for a feeling of calm and balance. Many times, I filmed, the whole scene in every single camera position. This wasn't the most efficient way to shoot the film, but later, during the editing, I was very glad that I did it that way because every single take was different, offering multiple options for different emotions.

RESHAPING THE ORIGINAL IDEA

Editing my own thesis film was a very important goal that I had with this project since for me this is where most of the intellectual learning of the filmmaking process happens. It's a very reflective moment, since everything in terms of the purpose of the scene can be questioned. For example, does the shot reflect the true emotion of the scene, am I telling the character's truth, etc. However, because of these questions, all the larger flaws of the film were revealed, and those flaws came from mistakes that happened in previous parts of the production process.

When I did the first cut of the film, I realized that the traditional linearity of the script was not going to work. The way we shot the film, with very slow action and long scenes, was dragging the narrative down too much, making the film long, inaccessible and uninteresting. The solution was to go back to a crazy idea that I had previously had while working on the early versions of the script: mixing the temporality.

A way to justify this, more than the idea of efficiency or entertainment, was the idea of an emotional rather than logical use of time and space. Using *Spring Breakers* directed by Harmony Korine as a reference, I realized that time and space don't have to be continuous when there is a strong emotion unifying different moments. In *Spring Breakers*, for example, a scene starts with the present time and then intersperses images from the past and future. All is then unified by a reflective voice from the present, making the experience evocative, emotionally empathic and less linear.

This strategy helps in two keys moments in *Violet Slumber*: when everything is great between them/where love and passion are abundant and when Eve leaves Ambrose/where images of a happy youthful past are juxtaposed with the sad aging reality of her needing to sacrifice the relationship to save him. This process required a complete

shift in how the film was supposed to be shaped and felt. Luckily, the result was successful – there seems to be a balance between effectiveness and emotion. The change was also a good one because the scenes necessary to continue with a totally linear narrative had been cut during principal photography (some scenes felt visually repetitive seemed too expositional).

Edit wise, the more dramatic moments were left to lie in the order they were originally conceived. The slow rhythm and long shots helped to achieve raw emotions in those places, in a way that spliced imagery would not. Therefore, a combination of non-linear moments and slow and conventional ones allow the film to delve into moments that represent different tones, moods and atmospheres.

AGAINST PICK-UPS OR RESHOOTS

A big problem arose during the editing process that I had not foreseen. There was a lack of information needed to tell the audience what was going on with these characters. The first scene was supposed to inform the audience as to who these people were and what they were up against. Unfortunately, the scene completely failed in communicating this in a way that would move the story forward, nor did it make us reflect on what was going on in the scene.

I've been against pick-ups for a long time. I used to believe that what you get in principal photography is simply what you have. I used to think of pick-ups as something that represented laziness or sloppiness on set. Of course, those kinds of comments came from a position of comfortable ignorance. Many things could go wrong on set and many things can change on set that will not necessarily work for the film later on. In reality, the only way to see where the film is going is in the editing process. When I saw that I didn't

have a good introduction to the film, I had to ask my cast and crew to come back to set to shoot a new beginning from scratch.

Many birds had to be killed with one stone: we needed to inform the audience about this condition, we needed to present them as real people, and we needed a powerful and interesting way to start the film. Considering the fact the film was made in a subtle way, I couldn't afford to be too explicit with the information. Hannah, the cinematographer, had the idea of crafting a scene that would be entirely improvised with no written dialog. This way, we could feel that the characters come in-part from the reality of the actors, and as a result they would feel like real people. Thus, I wrote a two-page step outline with detailed actions, but left the dialog to the actors. Of course, this was in complete opposition to the absolute control of every action and piece of dialog that is allowed in a shooting script (and in our shooting script). Also, the idea was to take advantage of the great chemistry between the actors, which was well-established once principal photography was wrapped. It was easy for them to improvise and provide realistic performances.

When I edited the new first scene I realized that it was completely worth it. The scene works better than the original and the goal of informing, presenting and grounding the characters in real people was finally accomplished. Our budget also made it possible for us to afford the pick-ups, which is a luxury that doesn't happen very often. Without the pick-ups, the film's ultimate result would not be what it is right now. They were a tremendous addition to the narrative and feel of the film.

VISUAL FX

Another big part of the post-production process was the VFX, since Travis and I had decided to show a photochemical manifestation of the odd condition that Eve and Ambrose had. The idea behind the glow was to have a beautiful counterpoint to a reality or process that was the opposite... getting old in an unpleasant way, which is what happens to Ambrose. On paper, the glow sounded great and after the edit was done, I fully committed to the idea VFX-wise.

In order to accomplish this, I decided that every time there was skin-to-skin contact there had to be a glow on screen coming from the surface of their skin. However, new questions were raised while creating the FX. What happens when it's skin to hair? What happens when they kiss? What happens when they hug or cuddle? How can I make this as efficient as possible (since I was doing most of the VFX myself, with some help)? The solution was the same key to editing the film: emotion. Sometimes, when the skin touches the hair we see the glow, and sometimes we don't. The reason being that sometimes a glow was present because the shot was necessary (something magical needed to manifest in that moment), and when it started to get repetitive or just unnecessary, the glow was skipped. Also, the intensity of the glow changes while the movie progresses. The first time we see the glow it is more intense, and then it becomes subtler as the scene progresses. The reason for this is to impress the audience with the effect at the beginning, but not tire them out too much with the FX either. It was important to not distract them from the drama or action. Therefore, there is a consistency to the glow's inconsistency.

CONCLUSION

Love stories are, probably, one of the most universal ways to share thoughts, points of view and emotions with an audience. Regardless of where we come from or what our values are, these kinds of stories speak to the human experience – especially when the characters are portrayed honestly. This was our greatest challenge with the cast and crew of this film. No matter how universal the themes treated in this film were, there was still a big effort made to ensure the film looked like it had happened in a place like Austin, Texas. The characters look and live in places that seem frozen in time, much like East Austin. Characters have an edge, make bold decisions and sometimes prefer to live in their own universe. The characters are still innocent and idealistic, no matter how old they are. Could this film be made in another place in the world? Probably, but not like this, not with these people and not with this look.

Even though my national identity is not presented in this film, there are values, ethical, philosophical and moral beliefs that come from me, as well as from the rest of the team. Everything mentioned above is transmitted through the art we make, in a direct or in an indirect way.

The film comes from a mixture of different perspectives because of the different origins of the people who collaborated in this process with me. This made the film unique, different, and its own animal. That's something that I wanted to bring to all my films: the unique points of view that foreigners can have on a culture they are trying to adapt to, sometimes observing from a distance as mere spectators, but other times as protagonists of our own stories in strange places.

APENDIX A:
Shooting Script

Violet Slumber

Written by

Travis Maiuro

Story by

Travis Maiuro & Sebastián Bisbal

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

FADE IN:

A woman's finger tracing a man's bare arm... A VIOLET GLOW underneath her fingertip when it touches the man's skin...

White morning light spills in from the window and across the blankets of the bed.

In bed, AMBROSE (charmingly messy) and EVE (eyes that light up a room), face each other, their naked shoulders peeking out from under the blankets. They both look to be in their early 30s.

Ambrose traces Eve's bare arm, too. They look at each other.

EVE

Have you thought any more about it?

AMBROSE

I've been trying not to think about it.

EVE

We can't ignore it anymore, Ambrose. We can't just keep pushing it off and saying we'll think about it later.

AMBROSE

I know.

EVE

Do you not want to?

AMBROSE

You know I do. It's just... it's complicated, Eve.

EVE

I know it's complicated. But the way it is now is even more complicated. I'm tired of running around in secret, seeing you only every once in a while...

AMBROSE

We'd have to drop everything. Are we ready for that?

EVE
Why do you think I'm asking you? Of course I'm ready. I thought we were both ready--

AMBROSE
I'm just... honestly, Eve? I'm scared. And I'm afraid to pull you into something that I don't know--

EVE
Hey. You're not pulling me into anything. This is our decision.

They look into each other's eyes and smile.

EVE (CONT'D)
Right?

Ambrose nods, kisses Eve.

AMBROSE
Things are gonna get weird.
Eve smiles wider.

EVE
I like weird.

Under the sheets, their bodies move closer together and a violet glow illuminates.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eve stands by the fridge, looking at various magnets and pictures... She notices a picture of teenage Ambrose, holding a guitar with a bunch of other grungy-looking teenagers.

Ambrose enters the doorway and sets down a heavy cardboard box next to other boxes.

AMBROSE
That's the last one.

Eve smiles and turns back towards a wall calendar stuck to the freezer with a magnet. She grabs a pen, crosses off the FIRST SATURDAY OF MAY.

EVE
It's official now!

She comes over and gives him a kiss.

AMBROSE
Well, it'll be official once we
unpack all of your stuff.

EVE
What a buzzkill... That sounds so
boring.

Ambrose laughs.

AMBROSE
What, you're just gonna live out of
these boxes?

EVE
(duh, like it's obvious)
Uh, yeah.

She starts to walk away down a hallway.

AMBROSE
Where are you going? Not gonna help
unpack your own stuff?

She takes off her shirt and looks back at him over her
shoulder.

EVE
Nope.

She starts to undo her jeans, letting them slip down-- but
turns the corner, out of sight, before they're off
completely.

Ambrose, dumbstruck, glances at the boxes.

AMBROSE
Well, fuck.

He takes off his shirt and follows Eve's footsteps down the
hallway, undoing his pants as well.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Ambrose and Eve kiss passionately, tangled up in the sheets.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ambrose and Eve lie on top of each other, on the couch,
kissing passionately.

INT. SHOWER - NIGHT

Eve against the shower wall, water running down, Ambrose kissing her neck, his hand against her thigh, lifting it up around himself...

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Eve's hand putting a record on. The music begins and plays over:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Eve and Ambrose brush their teeth together in their underwear, learning how to navigate and share the space.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Both on the couch, Eve has propped her legs atop Ambrose's lap as they both read.

AMBROSE

Listen to this... it's e.e. cummings. "... Here is the deepest secret nobody knows... here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows higher than soul can hope or mind can hide... and this is the wonder that's keeping stars apart...

(beat)

I carry your heart (I carry it in my heart)."

EVE

"The sky of the sky"...

She smiles.

INT. BATHROOM - DAY

Eve staring at her reflection in the mirror. She is inspecting a tuft of grey hair. Wrinkles at the edges of her eyes.

She fixes her hair so the grey can't be seen. Out of sight, out of mind.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eve and Ambrose slow-dance to the record. Eve touches the grey in Ambrose's hair.

AMBROSE
Doesn't look so bad, right?

EVE
Very distinguished.

AMBROSE
That's what I was thinking. A regular silver fox, right?

EVE
More like magnificent silver fox.

AMBROSE
Ooh, that's fancy. Even better.

They laugh.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
You should show yours off.

He fingers the grey in her hair.

EVE
I don't know.

AMBROSE
What? You look beautiful.

She scrunches up her face and shyly puts it into his shoulder. She looks back up at him and smiles, her eyes growing less self-conscious.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Eve and Ambrose eat spaghetti while watching a movie, though we don't see what they're watching.

Soon, Eve has her head in Ambrose's lap, passed out, while he continues to watch the TV. He smiles at her, brushing her hair behind her ear.

The grey in her hair is more present now.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Eve and Ambrose wake up for the day. Eve slides out of bed, Ambrose continues to lie in bed.

He watches Eve get dressed, deep affection in his eyes.

He slides out of bed.

Dressed, they kiss at the foot of the bed.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

In different clothes, they do the same thing--

Get dressed, kiss at the foot of the bed.

Again.

And Again.

And again.

All the while, they appear to gradually get older. By the final kiss at the foot of the bed, they both look to be in their 50s.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Eve and Ambrose brush their teeth together and their reflections in the mirror reveal how much they have aged.

Crinkles at their eyes, wrinkles on their foreheads and chins. The grey is more overwhelming in their hair now.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Ambrose stands in front of the open refrigerator, unmoving. His hair is almost completely grey now.

He seems to be lost in thought-- or no thought at all. He looks around, as if remembering something.

He closes the fridge door and moves out of the room. As he passes we see--

The calendar on the fridge: SAME MONTH, SAME YEAR as earlier, when Eve moved in. In fact, the X on that first SATURDAY is still there.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eve enters the kitchen to find a pan atop the stove, burning-- smoke billowing and filling the room.

Coughing, she frantically tries to put the fire out.

EVE
Ambrose! Ambrose?

She manages to kill the flames, coughing at the strong smell of burnt.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Eve looks in through doorways, looking for Ambrose.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Eve enters, finding Ambrose sitting on his side of the bed. He stares out of the window, still.

EVE
Ambrose?

No response.

She approaches him, putting a hand on his shoulder. He slowly reacts, turning towards her and then smiling.

AMBROSE
Hey.

Eve stares, confused.

EVE
Were you cooking something?

AMBROSE
What's that?

EVE
The stove was... had you started
cooking something?

AMBROSE
Oh, yeah. I made some eggs.

Eve stares, unsure how to proceed.

EVE
But... no... you didn't. I think
you forgot about them, Ambrose--

AMBROSE
I probably should have asked if you
wanted some but I didn't think
about it. I just wanted a quick
snack--

EVE
You didn't make any eggs, though. I
just found the pan burning; you
left them on the stove and forgot
about them--

AMBROSE
No, I didn't. I made them.

EVE
Ambrose. I just found the pan-- you
didn't.

AMBROSE
Why are we arguing about this? This
is ridiculous. I made the eggs. I
remember...

He trails off. Double-guessing himself... but he says no
more.

Eve stares, thinking. Comprehending. Sadness in her eyes.

EVE
Okay. You're right. You made eggs.

She rubs his back. He doesn't react and she turns and leaves.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ambrose sleeps soundly. Eve, on the other hand, is wide awake, staring at the ceiling.

She glances over at the sleeping Ambrose, too much on her mind.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eve and Ambrose sit across from MARK and CHARLOTTE (30s, clearly in love). The age of Ambrose and Eve (now looking on the worse side of 70) contrasts starkly with that of Mark and Charlotte.

Everyone drinks wine and picks at an appetizer plate.

Charlotte holds out her phone to show Eve and Ambrose some photos of a BABY.

CHARLOTTE

This was her first time eating spaghetti, look.

EVE

Oh my god, how adorable!

Eve shows it to Ambrose who smiles.

EVE (CONT'D)

I want one!

She realizes what she said a second too late. Ambrose's smile fades and a silence falls. Charlotte steps in to break it:

CHARLOTTE

She's such a handful. We hardly go out anymore. Even when we get a sitter, we're too tired.

MARK

(chuckling)

This year has been so exhausting.

CHARLOTTE

Can't believe she's almost a year.

EVE

Who's watching her now?

MARK

Oh, Charlotte's mom's a lifesaver.

CHARLOTTE
Sometimes I think she wants to move
in so she can just hangout with the
baby all the time.

Mark makes a face, making Eve and Ambrose laugh. Charlotte
playfully hits him.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)
Don't be mean.

AMBROSE
How old's your mom now?

CHARLOTTE
She'll be 70 next month. We've got
a little thing planned for her...

Ambrose and Eve nod, trying not to glance at one another.

AMBROSE
And how's your dad doing?

A silence overcomes the room... Ambrose the only one who
seems oblivious to it.

Charlotte glances at Eve, unsure of what to say. Eve places a
hand on top of Ambrose's.

MARK
You went to the funeral, buddy.
Remember? Two years ago.

Ambrose glances at Eve and then back at Charlotte and Mark.
He lets out an embarrassed chuckle.

AMBROSE
I'm sorry. I-- wow. Really, I'm
sorry. I remember now. Yeah. God, I
feel like an idiot--

CHARLOTTE
No, hey, don't worry about it.

Eve gives Ambrose's hand a squeeze-- the violet glow pulsing.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Eve and Charlotte stand by the window, looking out.

Outside, we see Mark and Ambrose standing in the front yard, talking. Ambrose points out things on the exterior of the house, talking man-stuff.

Charlotte turns to Eve.

CHARLOTTE
Can I ask you something?

EVE
Of course.

CHARLOTTE
Do you guys... I mean... Are you sure... You know... About this?

EVE
What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE
Are you sure you're making the right decision?

Eve takes a moment before answering.

EVE
Yes, we are.

CHARLOTTE
I'm not trying to pry, you know. It's just, you're the first couple I've met that are actually giving this thing a shot. My cousin and his ex had the same thing you guys have, but they didn't go through with it...

Eve cuts her off.

EVE
We're happy, Charlotte. And this is not a "thing".

CHARLOTTE
It's just, I'm worried that you guys---

EVE
Charlotte.

Eve meets her eyes and Charlotte stays quiet for a bit.

CHARLOTTE
Okay. You're right. I'm sorry. As
long as you guys are happy...

EVE
We are.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Ambrose, in a t-shirt and boxers and socks, and Eve, in a
pink slip, sit on opposite sides of the bed, facing away from
one another.

Eve brushes her hair and talks, still facing the wall.

EVE
I'm sorry, okay? I already told you
it just slipped out. Anyway, that's
just a thing people say when you
look at baby pictures. A lot of the
times, you don't even mean it.

AMBROSE
It's fine.

EVE
Doesn't sound like it's fine.

AMBROSE
It's not about that.

EVE
What is it then?

Ambrose takes a deep breath.

AMBROSE
I wish I could do that for you. I
wish we were normal and could start
a family, too.

EVE
What're you talking about? Family
is you and me--

AMBROSE
Yeah, but here I am, forgetting
shit, feeling like I'm losing my
mind.

Eve tries to make eye contact with Ambrose.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
I don't know, it probably was just
a bad idea to have them over--

EVE
It was good for us. We need to see
our friends.

AMBROSE
But do we really want them to see
us? I mean, look at us!

Eve stands up and faces him.

EVE
Who cares? I don't care!

AMBROSE
Eve--

EVE
No, I want you to be honest, this
is good.

AMBROSE
That's not--

EVE
You know what was "probably a bad
idea?" Us choosing to stay
together. How about that? Maybe
that was the worst idea we've ever
had!

She storms out of the room. Ambrose heaves himself to his
feet.

AMBROSE
It was your idea to stay together!

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ambrose lumbers out to find Eve, washing dishes in the sink.

AMBROSE
What're you doing?

EVE
I'm cleaning! What's it look like?

AMBROSE
Why? We can do those in the morning.

EVE
We always leave it for the morning and then we say leave it for the night and then-- I just want to fucking not push something off for a change--

AMBROSE
Just leave them, Eve. I'll take care of them--

EVE
Fine! Whatever!

She drops the dishes with a CLANG. She goes to move around him but he holds onto her arm.

She looks up at him.

EVE (CONT'D)
I know it was my idea. And that's why I feel so... I mean... look at you, Ambrose.

He glances down at his cane and then back at Eve.

She turns to the refrigerator and takes the calendar off and holds it out to Ambrose.

EVE (CONT'D)
I only moved in two weeks ago. Two weeks, and look at us already. Look what I'm doing to you.

Ambrose shakes his head.

AMBROSE
I don't know what you want me to say--

EVE
Get mad at me! I want you to be angry, blame me!

AMBROSE
But I don't--

EVE
I know, and I hate it.

AMBROSE
Eve, stop.

EVE
I want you to tell me that this was
stupid, that this is my fault. Tell
me to leave. So we can go back to
normal.

AMBROSE
I don't want you to leave.

He moves closer to her.

AMBROSE (CONT'D)
And I don't want to leave. You know
that.

EVE
But I'm not good for you.

AMBROSE
That's stupid.

He moves his hand to her face, they look into each other's
eyes, as Ambrose keeps his hand there.

They're starting to age again, quicker, more visibly.

They both look at each other while this happens. Ambrose's
eyes begin to look at Eve without any recognition before--

His hand suddenly flies to his chest. He leans against the
counter, now clutching his arm.

Eve drops the calendar to the floor.

EVE
Ambrose--

Ambrose drops to the floor. Eve runs over to him, panicked.
She crouches down, holding his face.

He looks at her, but there's no recognition at all in his
eyes now. She panics and can't touch him anymore.

She grabs the phone and dials.

Next to them, the calendar lies on the floor.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Through the door frame, we can see Ambrose sleeping in bed.
We hear Eve talking over the phone.

EVE (O.S.)
The doctor said he'd be fine. Just
needs rest.

Eve, now wearing a robe, sits on a chair, phone to her ear.

EVE (CONT'D)
No, I'm good. You don't need to
come.

Eve listens to the phone.

EVE (CONT'D)
Thank you, Charlotte. You too.

Eve stands up and walks to the doorway.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Eve stands in the doorway, staring at the sleeping Ambrose,
looking more frail than ever now.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Eve, fully dressed, sits at the table, writing a note.

EVE (V.O.)
Here is the deepest secret nobody
knows...

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Eve places the folded up note on the bedside table next to
the sleeping Ambrose.

EVE (V.O.)
Here is the root of the root and
the bud of the bud and the sky of
the sky of a tree called life...

She leans down to kiss his forehead-- but she stops herself.
She moves back a bit, hesitant to touch him again.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

We follow Eve as she grabs a bag and heads toward the kitchen. She takes a look at the fridge and sees the picture of Ambrose, very young, playing with his band.

She keeps walking to the back door. She takes a deep breath and opens the door, the morning sunlight blasting in.

EVE (V.O.)
Which grows higher than soul can
hope or mind can hide...

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

We continue to follow her as she makes her way down the front path and then down the sidewalk.

EXT. SIDEWALK - DAY

Eve keeps walking and as she walks, she SLOWLY AGES BACKWARDS.

EVE (V.O.)
And this is the wonder that's
keeping stars apart...

She turns one corner, and she looks fifty again.

Another corner, she's back to forty.

She stops to look at the sky-- and she looks like she's in her 30's again.

EVE (V.O.)
I carry your heart (I carry it in
my heart).

She looks back towards the way she came. Keeps walking the other way, leaving an empty frame.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. EAST AUSTIN - DAY

Eve, her normal age, walks out of a restaurant alone.

She looks ahead and something catches her eye.

Across the road, at a shop across the street--

Ambrose, now back to his normal age, walks towards his car carrying a guitar case, talking to a WOMAN in her early 30's, carrying a guitar case, as well. He unlocks the car and gets in, not seeing Eve across the street. The woman gets inside of the car too. The engine starts and the car starts moving.

Eve stares, unmoving. Thinking. Finally, she turns away and slowly starts to smile.

CUT TO VIOLET.